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LETTERS

1490. S. 20

FROM A

GENTLEMAN

IN IRELAND,

TO HIS FRIEND

AT BATH.

CORK.

PRINTED AT THE HERALD-OFFICE, DUNCAN-STREET.

1798.



LETTERS.

LETTER I.

Cork, September 10, 1798.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

THE necessity that compels you to have continual recourse to the restorative virtue of Bath waters, has long been lamented by your friends in this country: it is now peculiarly felt. If the agreeable qualities of your private character alone were wanting, they might be dispensed with, but no portion of public virtue can at such a time be spared. The absence of every well disposed gentleman, be the circle of his influence, example, and authority ever so small, is a serious misfortune; and I am sorry to be obliged to observe, that too many of our countrymen have quitted the posts they were bound by every tie of honour and duty to maintain, without half so good an apology for their desertion.

THE anxiety you feel to be made fully acquainted with the real situation of things here, is natural, and I wish with all my heart I was as well qualified as I am

to gratify it. A person who has been seven years absent from this country may be well surprised at the extraordinary changes that have taken place within so short a period. When you left your native land, it was advancing fast to opulence and importance.— Among the lower orders, the comforts of industry and exertion began to succeed to the misery of riot and idleness; while those of the better sort made a proportional progress in the culture of useful and polite arts. Religious prejudice seemed to have sacrificed its inveteracy at the altar of national concord, and liberality of sentiment, if not the order, was at least the fashion of the day. Agriculture and commerce received daily improvement and increase, and the accession of wealth for a few years immediately preceding this unfortunate rebellion was extremely rapid. No longer neglected, despised or unknown, Ireland began to feel the importance of her situation, and to attain among nations her due degree of rank and celebrity. The dignity and independence of her parliament being asserted and established, nothing but time and tranquillity seemed wanting to ensure to her sons as high a degree of temporal prosperity, as the imperfection of human nature can venture to aspire to. In the general system of government no material defect was observed, or at least complained of. The dispute among politicians respected the competency of ministers, not the form of the constitution. Diffusion of rival parties, struggling for ministerial advancement, is always found in a free state, and,

though



though productive of much rancour and violence, seems so far from retarding the general good, that to a certain degree, it appears necessary to promote it. In this state of affairs you left the country.—Every thing seemed to lead to happiness, prosperity, and peace. You desire to know by what dæmon the apple of discord has been thrown among us, and why a people so content, so thriving and so united, have on a sudden most unaccountably dashed their cup with gall, and given themselves up a prey to the most fiend-like and tormenting passions. You would even be incredulous, if it was possible to doubt the fact.— You think that a people so attached and amenable, would never have entered into lawless combination and bloody conspiracy without some cogent reasons, and you wish me to give you a candid account of their motives and their conduct. The northern part of the kingdom, you believe, has generally been more or less divided and disturbed by religious dissension, but in the south, the place of our nativity and residence, all appeared to be mutual confidence and harmony. You conceived the Roman Catholic tenant to be as affectionately attached, and to have as strong grounds of affectionate attachment to a Protestant landlord as to one of his own profession of faith, and convinced as you are that the conduct of the Protestant gentry has of late been even improving in point of kindness and liberality, it is a matter of the justest surprise to learn that they have in so many instances become victims to the barbarous and undistinguishing

tinguishing rage of the peasantry. You intreat me to explain, if I can, by what diabolical ingenuity, the agents of sedition, have been able to arm the hand of the domestic against his master, to persuade the tenant to conspire against the life of his landlord, and to induce the subject, at the risk of his own life and property, to meditate the destruction of that government from which he had received favours that some years ago his most ardent expectations did not aspire to, and under which he was thriving with almost unexampled rapidity. Of the general nature and extent of the conspiracy the reports of the secret committees of our two houses of parliament have given a clear and succinct account. I shall endeavour to enter a little more into detail, in order to explain the true springs and motives by which such sanguinary passions were excited, and so many jarring and discordant parts combined into a revolutionary system, to promote the ambitious designs of a few turbulent men, whose wickedness and temerity would, perhaps, have been more severely punished by their success, than they have been by their disappointment.

I remain, &c.

LETTER II.

THE origin of our troubles is undoubtedly to be ascribed to the French revolution, that most fertile and extensive source of discontent, turbulence and insurrection. The plausibility of its first principles, was, it must be confessed, almost irresistibly imposing. The idea of a government, in which power was never to be abused, where merit alone was to be rewarded by distinction, and where all were to live in tranquil and happy brotherhood, could not fail to fascinate and delight: such a system of social communion had often been the subject of philosophic theory, but was never before considered as reducible to practice. The felicity of an Utopia incompatible with human frailty, is only to be found in the imagination. Nothing, however, is insurmountable to that vanity which scorning to build upon wisdom and experience of others, aspires to an exclusive sapience. The *illuminated* sages of the Parisian school pretended to see no difficulty in accomplishing what the collected wisdom of six thousand years had declared to be impracticable. The result of the undertaking corresponded with its arrogance, and exhibited a series of disappointments and calamities, from which human pride, would it deign to be taught, might draw a most profitable lesson. Among the various parties that successively

cessively presided in that distracted country, profession and practice have been so singularly at variance with each other, that laws appear to have been made, for the sole pleasure of having them repealed; decrees issued, for no other purpose than to be reversed; and principles laid down, only that they may be violated. The constitution, which one assembly pronounced to be a masterpiece of human contrivance, was found by another incomplete and defective; it was succeeded, of course, by a second effort of ingenuity, the perfection of which was equally admirable, but, alas! equally transitory. A monarchy under certain restrictions, though sanctioned by the general consent of the nation, was, without waiting the test of an experiment, exchanged for a republic under no restriction at all. To abolish the reign of superstition they engaged a strumpet to personate a goddess. The person of their late King was by the solemn voice of the legislature declared to be inviolable, but a short time before they cut off his head. The *Trade of War* was expressly renounced as incompatible with the *new* philanthropy; yet it has been in fact almost the only trade of regenerated and benevolent France! This everlasting war of principle with practice; this wanton disregard of every thing serious, solemn and obligatory; this perpetual sacrifice of justice to expediency; this versatility of system which forbids the harassed subject to expect the comfort of security under settled laws, have, it is true, in a great measure restored to the deluded mind its sanity of judgment.

judgment. The fascinating vision is gone by and we are recovered to reason and common sense. The delusion no doubt could be only temporary, but during its continuance what horrors might have ensued I tremble even to think! Even among the enlightened inhabitants of Great Britain, where every blessing is enjoyed that a happy climate, a fertile and highly improved country, a well regulated government, and a flourishing commerce can bestow, were found proselytes to the new doctrines, who would have hazarded their real comforts in the pursuit of imaginary felicity; light and lively imaginations were captivated by speciousness and novelty.— To profligate men of desperate fortune any convulsion appeared desirable, while unprincipled ambition beheld in revolution the ready means of aggrandizement. To cherish and diffuse the innovating spirit artful and inflammatory publications were circulated with the most insidious industry; and, as if the pen was insufficient to answer the purposes of those disturbers of human repose, the powers of the tongue also were actively exerted in the same cause. Speeches were made and lectures delivered to astonished and admiring multitudes, in which the salutary restrictions of law were represented as unreasonable, partial and oppressive, and the novel blessings of liberty and equality recommended and displayed in terms of the highest rapture. The mode of assembling in clubs or small societies, in which politics were discussed and debated, became general, and every porter-house could boast a set of statesmen, who, without the aid

of education or experience, conceived themselves competent to every branch of legislative occupation. In a malady so general it was impossible for our island to escape contagion. More giddy, thoughtless, and irritable in their dispositions than the inhabitants of Great Britain, the Irish are of course more susceptible of novel impressions, exclusive of which consideration, there existed among them some peculiar causes of discontent, which it shall be the business of a succeeding letter to investigate and explain.

I remain, &c.

LETTER III.

IT seems extraordinary that rational creatures should wantonly abuse their distinguishing privilege; that they should neglect a real, to pursue an imaginary good, and forsake the substance, to follow the shadow. Security of person and property, under well administered laws, is all that the bulk of a people can expect, or indeed can receive, from any form of government. The government which protects and encourages the honest and industrious, whatever be its name, merits their confidence and claims their support. Change can hardly improve their condition,

tion, but may very easily make it worse. The truth is that the desire of change, even in governments of very inferior character, seldom, if ever originates with the people. It is not the sense of oppression in the many, but the lust of power in the few that generates the discontented spirit. The facility with which the weak and tottering fabric of French monarchy was overthrown, stimulated the turbulent in other nations. The sudden exaltation to supreme power, from the middle and even from the lower ranks of society, exhibited a very seductive and dangerous example.— Every factious and noisy fellow who possessed, or, what was the same thing, fancied he possessed talents for legislating, beheld a passage opened to his ambition, and straightway aspired to be a ruler. But as the new sovereigns could not be invested with dominion, before the people had been prevailed upon to dispossess the old ones, it was in the first place necessary to diffuse discontent, in order to excite tumult and provoke rebellion. In Great Britain, the efforts of the republican faction were violent but ineffectual. The vigour of government seconded by the good sense of the people, soon defeated the projects and disappointed the hopes of the revolutionists.— The steady character of the English, which in times of inferior knowledge as well as of inferior prosperity, induced them to preserve their laws and customs inviolate, now peculiarly demanded of them to declare, with the determined voice of true patriotism, *Nolumus leges Angliae mutari.* In Ireland the same

strong and general spirit of attachment was not to be expected. Besides the great difference subsisting between the inhabitants of both countries, in point of civilization, and all the arts and enjoyments of social life, other causes concurred to promote discontent, and facilitate the admission of revolutionary principles. Dissonance of religious worship, carrying with it, for a long time back, a discordance of political opinion, prevented that cordiality of sentiment, that union of interest, so desirable in every society, and so happily pervading the people of England. The Presbyterians of the north, descended from the old leveling party, which overturned the monarchy in the time of the first Charles, have always had a hankering after republicanism, and of course lent a willing ear to the specious doctrine of equality. The Catholics of Ireland, warmly attached to the interests of the Stuart family, were but beginning to be reconciled to the more liberal principles of the house of Hanover: the partiality of the former to the Roman Catholic religion endeared them particularly to a people professing the same creed, and who, to speak of them in the general, were extremely ignorant, and consequently more likely to act from blind and bigotted attachment, than from motives of judicious discrimination. Notwithstanding a long interval of amicable intercourse and connection with their Protestant fellow-subjects, they had not yet erased from their minds the recollection of past animosity. Looking upon them as Heretics, incapable of merit in the sight of God, agreeable

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to a very absurd, as well as illiberal tenet of the Romish church, they beheld with jealousy a religion so obnoxious established in preference to their own. They had not ceased to regret the suppression of their ancient clans, and the downfall of their hereditary chieftains; and considering the Protestants, in general, as descendants of those English settlers by whom their native leaders were dispossessed, regarded them in the odious character of conquerors or usurpers. Notions of this kind, handed down from one generation to another, lose something of their force by every transmission, and would in time, were no opportunity of revival to occur, be entirely effaced. Habits of industry and increasing civilization would finally produce the reformation most wanted here—a reformation of *manners*. This happy æra, however, was yet far distant: the smothered embers of discontent, which a century of tranquillity would scarcely suffice to extinguish, were, with but too much facility fanned into a flame. The leaders of the conspiracy, whose ostensible object was the good of the people, whose real end was their own aggrandizement, sedulously made use of every means to nourish jealousy and excite dissatisfaction: every source of complaint was diligently explored; every species of grievance, real or imaginary, artfully exaggerated; every latent prejudice fomented; and every fierce and lawless desire encouraged to expect its amplest gratification. Each member of the confederacy, from the pike-armed peasant to the dagger-bearing director, beheld in full view the accomplishment

accomplishment of his favourite purpose. The indigent were lured by the hope of riches, the wealthy by the prospect of power. To better his condition is the natural wish of man. To do it honestly is his duty and, generally speaking, his happiness. But to do it honestly, though his real, is not always his apparent interest. The object of desire seems frequently attainable by a shorter than the prescribed road, and in the hope of rapid acquisition, crime and danger are preferred to virtue and delay. For the ignorant and uneducated something may be urged in extenuation. They have not learned to subdue and regulate their passions. Engrossed by present objects, and unaccustomed to act from reflection, they fall into the tempter's snare with a facility, which is more a matter of regret than surprise. But where shall we seek a palliative for the base and treacherous conduct of those who ought to have known better? The insolent mockery of French professions was now at an end. The simplest understanding had ceased to be their dupe. It was not even pretended that their boasted republicanism could make men wiser, worthier, or happier, on the contrary it was almost universally admitted to have produced the very opposite effects. Let me then suppose a man blessed by Heaven with superior talents, which his condition in life had happily enabled him to cultivate and improve; let me suppose him in a situation of rare and enviable felicity; the distinguished object of national honour and reward; occasionally possessed of power, permanently

enjoying

enjoying opulence and admiration. Let me suppose the same man preposterously converting all these springs of happiness into an abundant source of misery, a prey to jealousy, rancour, envy and malevolence. Let me suppose him endeavouring to distract the councils of government, because he is not permitted exclusively to direct them. Let me suppose him employing those talents, the right exertion of which had procured him a rich harvest of emolument and renown, to inflame, exasperate and divide. And lastly, let me suppose him perfidiously conniving at, if not actually leagued with, an abandoned and desperate faction, associated for the purpose of overturning, by every sanguinary and iniquitous stratagem, that very constitution he had so frequently pagenyrised, so assiduously improved, and so successfully established! To what wayward perversion of mind, to what unaccountable dereliction of principle, is such unnatural delinquency to be ascribed? He, like Macbeth,

..... Had no spur,
To prick the sides of his intent, but only,
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself,
And falls on the other side.—

That this kind of ambition may ever fall, and fall with full measure of ignominy, must be the wish of every honest heart. When such men forsake the paths of duty and honour, the deviation of inferiors becomes a matter of less astonishment. Still, however,

ever, it is not easy to account even for their misconduct. Every day, it is true, produces abundant instances of guilt and folly. But the degree of both which actuated their proceedings admits no comparison with the general tenour of human delinquency. To risque my own life and property in pursuit of a favorite object, however criminal and rash, derives some colour of excuse from the right I am supposed to have of making free with my own. But to kindle the flames of civil discord, to incite to rapine, treachery and murder, to expose and endanger the lives of thousands, for the precarious chance of an object I may never attain, and which if I do obtain, I shall probably but for a very short time enjoy, has something in it too shocking and horrible for a deliberate purpose. The power of the state, whatever be the form of its government, must be confided to a few. Among the excluded there will necessarily be found many whose merit may entitle them to a share in the administration, but who are not therefore authorized to dispossess by violence their more fortunate competitors. The means of honest advancement are in some measure open to all, and opportunity of promotion, though it may be zealously sought, must be waited with patience. Is every proud and petulant upstart, who roars at a club, or declaims at a porter-house, to set his face against the laws of his country, revile her rulers, and overset her government, because he wants what thousands more worthy than himself must aspire to in vain? Is he to slight the substantial blessings

ings of industrious attainment, because he cannot decorate his brow with the wreath of power? If such principles are admitted, no constitution however perfect can exist, because no constitution however perfect will preclude, what is inseparably attached to the nature of man, discontent. The government must be bad indeed, which would justify a revolution on the modern plan of tumult, rapine, massacre and proscription. In the calm of old establishment, we discern the rock and the shore, we know what to seek and what to shun, we can ascertain the exact measure of injury and advantage; but in the storm of revolution, the vessel floats at the mercy of winds and waves, the port of rest and safety is hidden from our view, and nothing is certain but her danger. Prudence will therefore recommend Hamlet's judicious reflection, and

Make us rather bear those ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of.

I would not, however, be thought to discourage the ardour of rising genius, or damp the fair efforts of political improvement. I would only point out the rational means of attaining so desirable a purpose.— In my humble conception, reformation can never be secure and permanent, unless it be temperate and gradual. If the wise and learned of every nation, instead of wasting their ingenuity in fanciful theories, and employing their ambition in struggles for power, would apply their talents to the cultivation of useful

arts, moral improvements, and equitable regulations, there would be little to complain of on the score of government. Useful virtue will always command respect, and that which has long been respected will, at last, be imitated. When a man is unhappy, only from the want of *power*, the chance is against his happiness in any government. As long as I enjoy rational freedom and secure industry, the means of happiness depend upon myself, the government under which I live is entitled to my support, and whatever be its name and designation, I must be a fool indeed if I endeavour to change it.

For forms of Government let fools contest,
Whate'er is best administer'd is best.

I remain &c.

LETTER IV.

THE conviction of some leading traitors, and the confession of others, have, at length, fully and incontrovertibly demonstrated the early existence of a revolutionary conspiracy, which, under the pretext of reforming, was to overturn the constitution. Administration, it now appears, was all along apprized of the design; and the obloquy which has been thrown upon our ministers for opposing concessions to *Rebels* under.

the name of *Reformists*, must now be converted into praise for their wise and vigilant superintendance.— Measures of severity and restriction, which, before we were fully apprized of the extent of our danger, might have appeared harsh and oppressive, are now seen to have been lenient and salutary. In this country indeed few persons could pretend to be ignorant of the real designs of the United Irishmen; since the year 1795, at least, they have been sufficiently obvious: no intelligent person has entertained a doubt upon the subject. For a long time, the stratagems made use of by the conspirators prevented any legal detection of their guilt; but as it happens in many other cases, their criminality was not the less notorious for its impunity for being able to evade the formalities of a court of justice.

At the time that ARTHUR O'CONNOR was brought to trial in England upon charges of high treason, as the nature of his designs was no secret here, it was generally supposed that he could not escape conviction. That he might be acquitted through defect of evidence, though certainly a good fortune that was not expected to befall him, could not, however, being an event by no means uncommon, create any extraordinary surprise. That several of the most renowned characters in England for talents and patriotism, should appear the *sworn* vouchers of his loyal conduct, and constitutional integrity, was to every man in this country a matter of real astonishment. Knowing

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ing what we did, and supposing that it was equally known to others, we were at a loss to account for such blindness in persons of such *illumination*. We felt ourselves reduced to this dilemma, either to suppose that his political sponsors were as inimical to the constitution they professed to revere, as the culprit himself, or, that a man whose disaffection was notorious to every Irishman of common sense and observation, had been able to impose upon some of the most sagacious and celebrated statesmen in Great-Britain. We were obliged to give up their integrity or their penetration—there was no alternative. I am well aware how far the prejudices and passions of party are there carried. I can very well believe that a person who had violently opposed the adherents of Mr. Pitt, would find, among Mr. Fox's friends, a higher degree of patronage and encouragement than his real merits could pretend to. I can even suppose them descending so far as to applaud and stimulate that empty turbulence which their understandings contemned, but I confess I thought them incapable of going further. Though not over nice in practice, I did not expect to see them renounce principle. I did not suppose they would go so far as to sacrifice their characters to the *manes* of their ambition. When shame and mortification stare them in the face, where will ingenuity fly for shelter?—It is a pitiful subterfuge to rest their defence upon an easy faith. Credulity is seldom indulged but where the parties own congenial sentiment. The case at best implies an incompetency

petency to govern, for the qualities of head and heart required to constitute the accomplished statesman, would necessarily have precluded so inexcusable a deception. We had, I am sorry to observe, statesmen here too, who from motives of pique and disappointment, or from a mean and temporising spirit, declined to take an open and manly part, and either deserted their duty altogether, like the English leaders of opposition, or if they appeared in their places, rather contributed to increase than allay the ferment. These too were the all sufficient statesmen who had the modesty to tell us that every discontent was ascribable to their dismissal, and that power in their hands would have been accompanied by tranquillity. To expose the puerile vanity of this declaration, we need only appeal to the records and acknowledgments of the rebellious union, from both which we learn that the original and fixed design of the confederacy was to "*subvert the constitution*;" that the system of concession and partial reform would encourage, not satisfy the conspirators, and that the vigorous measures of the succeeding administration saved the country. In many instances the preserving providence of God calls for our most grateful acknowledgments, and it is not among our smallest blessings, that the power of the state was so seasonably removed from persons who have since shewed themselves unequal to our protection, and unworthy of our confidence.

I remain, &c.

LETTER

LETTER V.

IN the primary constitution of the revolutionary project, it does not appear that religious party had any concern. A system of government formed upon the model of French republicanism, whose object was not only to exclude religious establishment, but religion itself, could not be supposed to include particularities of that nature. The artifices necessary for promoting insurrection might have rendered it advisable to have recourse to religious passions and prejudices in others, but the directorial leaders, composed of men from every sect, seem to have been entirely divested of any thing like pious sentiment themselves. In the commencement of the business, the enthusiastic spirit was Political, in the process it became in a great measure Religious! In truth it was impossible to raise on any other principle, (what, in the south of Ireland, of which I principally speak, was essentially necessary to the success of the plan) the great body of the peasantry consists almost entirely of Roman Catholics: to them, constitutional reform, or constitutional revolution, being equally incomprehensible, were equally uninteresting. Talk to a poor and ignorant peasant of elective franchise, universal suffrage, or republican felicity, and though you may make him stare, you certainly will not make him rebel. But tell him that his *Religion*, the pride and solace of his *existence*,

existence, is in danger from an obnoxious sect ; tell him that in destroying that sect, he will enrich himself and serve his God, and you speak a language perfectly intelligible. In justice to the Roman Catholics it must be acknowledged, that however criminal they have been in the progress of the rebellion, they are not fairly chargeable with its origin, and that the most active and sanguinary framers of the plot, were not only *Protestants*, but members of the established church. That the minds of the lowest class, several of them labouring under poverty, and all under ignorance and prejudice, were without much difficulty worked upon by the arts of seduction is not wonderful, but the too general disaffection of the better sort, who had neither ignorance nor poverty to plead in extenuation of trespass, deserves more severe reprehension. The persons to whom I now allude belong to the middle class, being composed of substantial landholders, professional men and merchants, whose defection is the more inexcusable from having found no countenance or encouragement in the conduct of those to whom they should have looked for example, the respectable heads of the ancient and opulent Roman Catholic houses. To the very loyal and honorable demeanor of these, among whom, in this province, the noble Viscount of KENMARE stands highly distinguished, every acknowledgment is due, while, as far as I have been able to observe, the reproach of sedition and conspiracy, belongs to the vanity of the *Upstart*. It is an observation confirmed by long experience,

perience, that *vulgar minds are unable to bear prosperity*. To such, a sudden elevation of rank or fortune, conveys an intoxicating quality, inducing a persuasion, that rapidity of advancement is owing to pre-eminence of merit. The sons of land-jobbers and farmers, taylors, and shoe-makers; of retailers of beer, and sellers of snuff, the persevering and successful industry of whose fathers (no slight proof by the bye, of a benign government) had by raising them to the rank of gentry, spoiled many an useful mechanic, became forsooth Politicians and Reformers. With no letter of recommendation but an unblushing front, with no other knowledge or information, than what the flimsy and insolent pages of *Tom Paine* afforded, they sat in judgment on the conduct of ministers, arraigned every measure of administration with more than parliamentary license, and from revilers, by a very natural gradation, became revolutionists. When such men, overstepping the modesty of nature, and the limits of propriety, threw over their clumsy limbs the senatorial robe, when such braying beasts affected the roar and assumed the garb of the Lord of the forest, who could help exclaiming with *Constance*, in King *John*,

Thou wear a lion's hide! doff it for shame,
And hang a calve-skin on those recreant limbs.

These too, for ~~perve~~ ~~who~~ is the characteristic of the present time, were the persons who had least reason to complain. Exclusion from parliamentary honours and a few high offices of state, can be considered

as

as a grievance only by those whose talents and situation allow them to aspire to such an height. Of this exclusion the respectable persons before-mentioned might with some colour of propriety complain. But if *they* did not consider it a sufficient cause for quarrel with the constitution under which they enjoyed every other favour; If *they* did not consider it a justifiable pretext for overturning or even villifying the established government, still less should it appear so to their inferiors, the recent improvement of whose condition, ought, were they duly sensible of their obligation, to have riveted their attachment to the source of their prosperity. Far be it from me, however, to involve all the members of this class in an undistinguishing censure. That several among them did preserve a fixed and grateful sense of their allegiance, I am truly happy to acknowledge. We saw them in our brave Militia gallantly fighting in defence of their King and Country; we beheld them in the ranks of our glorious Yeomanry, emulating the ardour of their Protestant fellow-subjects; we saw them remaining firm upon their posts in the hour of danger and distress, while others, even where through fear they professed friendship, made any trivial avocation an excuse for absence, and skulking into holes and corners, desrcrted their duty. At such a crisis the ill-affected alone could hang back. When aspiring candidates contend for the representation of a county, when the question is, whether the influence of this or that great man shall preponderate at the castle, the success of either party may be a source of solicitude, or a mat-

ter of indifference. But when the dispute concern not the administration of government, but its existence, when the bloody sword of civil war is unsheathed and the battle raging between the rebel and the loyalist, there can be no neutrality.—The question comes home to every man—his life, his property, his dearest interests are at stake—unless incapable of feeling, he cannot be indifferent to the issue—his wishes or his exertions must be on one side, and if he is not *for* the government he must be *against* it. Few therefore were imposed upon by the dissimulation of the concealed enemy, whose very countenances betrayed the secret wishes of the heart, and in which could be even read the intelligence of the day. When some brilliant success of his Majesty's arms was announced, chagrin and disappointment were plainly discoverable under an affected enjoyment of the triumph; whilst the sparkling eye, and scarce suppressed smile attested the inward satisfaction derived from the report of any circumstance favourable to the rebel cause. Will you believe that in this description truth obliges me to comprehend some members of the established church, some, who possessing every comfort of life, and every constitutional advantage, wanted even the shallow pretence of political grievance as discouragement, and whose defection, as unaccountable as it was base, though it may escape legal punishment, will be branded with perpetual detestation. To me, I confess, duplicity in such a cause appears more odious than open defiance. The man who draws his sword against my life, by the fair declaration

declaration of his intent, puts me on my guard and gives me at least an opportunity of preparing for my defence. But where shall one find a shield against the dagger of the assassin, who smiles in order to betray, and holds out an offer of co-operation during the day, that he may with more security stab in the night. It is one of the benevolent purposes of Providence, to make our very transgressions turn to our advantage, and out of evil to elicit good. The misconduct here reprobated will I trust be productive of a twofold benefit. The persons I speak of, will learn to moderate their passions, and subdue their vanity; by confining themselves within their proper spheres, and directing their views to suitable objects, they will escape the mortifying disappointments of a preposterous ambition, and endeavour to possess in happy contentment, the substantial, if not splendid, enjoyments of middle life. Happy indeed will they be, if from the eventful period of 1798 they shall both learn and practice so valuable a lesson! Nor will they alone be the gainers. Government also will learn, a point of no small importance at any time, to distinguish more accurately its true friends. Instead of being taken by professions, which cost nothing, it will ground its judgment of men upon the true test of merit and good conduct. It will accord to every description of subjects, protection of person, and encouragement of industry, but it will commit the possession of power to those only in whose political principles the most secure reliance can be placed.

I remain, &c.

LETTER VI.

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THE THERE is yet another description of persons in the Roman Catholic body above the lower rank of life, whose too general attachment to the *Rebel* cause is as much to be lamented as it is hard to be accounted for, I mean the clergy. They too had recently experienced the kind and liberal hand of government. They had been relieved from burdens and restrictions which a severe but necessary policy had inflicted, and it was hardly to be expected that they would be the first to justify that policy, by making the opportunity of shewing their gratitude, an occasion to display their disaffection. Gratitude indeed is a virtue, which though sometimes adorning humanity in the individual, is seldom found to grace it in the aggregate. Societies for the most part are directed by the general advantage of the body, with but too little regard to justice or generosity, and from the national assembly down to the municipal corporation, the ruling principle is—Interest. In their *collective* capacity, Priests, I believe, will generally be found to act like other men. But what interest could have suggested the line of conduct now under reprobation, it is not very easy to conceive. Were they induced to second the French design of subjugating this kingdom by the *piety* of the invaders? Whence arose the sudden violence of their attachment to the Gallic Directory? Was it because they insulted, robbed, and at length deposed the venerable head of the Roman church?

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Was it because they punished with death or banishment every priest in France who dared to oppose their impious views, or who refused to renounce his religious principles? Was it because they traduced, ridiculed, and endeavoured to abolish the Catholic religion itself? In the invading party there was nothing extremely inviting to the clerical character, and the principles of the Irish revolution were altogether as forbidding. Abolition of tithes and annihilation of church establishment were leading features of the new plan, so that though their Protestant rivals might lose by the revolution, they, as priests, had certainly nothing to gain. The negative side of the question admits less difficulty. It is easy to see the motives by which they were *not* actuated. It certainly was not a conscientious regard to their vows of allegiance to a mild and gracious Sovereign. It certainly was not a pious regard for the temporal as well as eternal happiness of the flocks committed to their charge, both of which would be much better consulted by inculcating peace and subordination. Whatever kingdom they looked too in the event of their success, it certainly was not the kingdom of heaven, which the divine author of Christianity declares shall reward the benignant spirit of the peace-makers.

You will say, my friend, that I am too severe in reprobating a whole body for the misconduct of some of its members: and that although it cannot be denied that several priests took a very active part in the rebellion, the conduct of far the greater number was dutiful

dutiful and loyal. That some of them conducted themselves in a laudable and exemplary manner, I am happy to testify, and I sincerely hope that the same may be safely affirmed of the majority. The Rt. Rev. Bishop that presides over the Catholics of this diocese, would do honour to any church, and adorn any station, and his example and exertions are not without imitation. But the names of so many Reverend Fathers, appear openly on the rebel list in the counties where hostilities actually took place, and the names of so many others are found among the suspected in counties where rebellion was prevented from raising its head, that I fear it will be difficult to reduce the censure from the aggregate to the individual. Indeed it is almost impossible to conceive that the principles of rebellious combination could have spread with such extensive and mischievous rapidity among the peasants if checked and controuled by the remonstrances and exhortations of those spiritual directors, to whom they are accustomed to unfold their deepest secrets, and to whose admonitions in every point of moral and religious concern, they pay a scrupulous regard. Whence was the peasant taught that he was fighting for his religion, and earning by his fall, the crown of immortality? These ardent and invigorating sentiments were not derived from the Irish Directory, who, whatever enthusiasm they might possess or instill, borrowed no spark of it from celestial fire. Unable to account for conduct apparently so preposterous, I must leave their Reverences to explain for themselves. It has, indeed,

been

been suggested that they, as well as several others who subsequently joined the Union, entertained views very different from those of the Directorial leaders, who might in reality have been labouring for others at the very time they so fondly fancied that every thing was conspiring to the exaltation of themselves. Many who appeared like Jackalls, catering for the Dublin lions, were, it is shrewdly suspected, hunting only their own prey. Did (it is asked) Father Murphy, who gallantly headed his invulnerable legions, opposing the shield of faith to the balls of Heretics, wield the blood-stained sword only—to exalt Napper Tandy and Thomas Emmett? Was it for the honour and emolument of an *infidel* Directory, that the *Catholic* became a church militant? All revolutionists agree in the beginning, because all have a common enemy in the established government. The sword which destroys that common enemy, cuts at the same time the gordian knot of their union. The power of the state is open to all and who shall limit the right of commonage. The only appeal is to the sword, and it is not until after many a bloody fray, that the decisive superiority of one faction, by putting an end to the existence of its rivals, puts an end to the contest. Whose would have been the final success upon this occasion, it is impossible to judge, but from the discordant nature of the parties composing the confederacy, one may confidently pronounce, what has been already observed of the Rebel leaders, that, they would be more severely punished by their success, than they have been by their disappointment.

I remain, &c.

LETTER VII.

THE ample and authentic information we now possess, enables us to calculate, with a considerable degree of precision, the true strength of the confederacy, in its three principal means of support. The Talents, the Property, and the Number of the conspirators. In the last of these only does it seem to me to have presented any thing extremely formidable. The plan was certainly framed with art, and carried on with secrecy, and among the several conducters of the business, is to be found no doubt much of that cunning, artifice, and stratagem, which similar occasions never fail to produce. But I surely do not flatter the loyalists by declaring that, in the balance of comparison, the *abilities* exerted against them, were light and insignificant indeed! To whatever rank, station, or profession we look, it is a matter of joyful and consolatory reflection to find their wisest, as well as their best members, ardently engaged in support of our political establishment. That talents have been displayed upon the opposite side, I do not deny, but they were for the most part the talents of youth, unaccompanied by judgment or reflection. They were the talents of persons, whose knowledge had never been matured by experience, and whose ability was exceeded by their arrogance.

IN point of property, the contest between the friends of the constitution and its enemies, was still greater

greater. Rebellion, with its promised harvest of plunder and confiscation, naturally accommodates itself to persons of reduced or desperate fortunes, to men who have little, and who desire much, who love to spend, but hate to earn. They who possess the comforts of life, lend a reluctant ear to any proposal that seems likely to injure or endanger them. A wayward ambition, it is true, will sometimes induce men to risque the possession of certain happiness, because unaccompanied by power, for the hope of greater felicity in a state more exalted. To this motive we may attribute the defection of several, who at the commencement of the conspiracy, appeared satisfied with their lot, and averse to the hazards of innovation. Some too, of timid and wavering disposition, deserted the royal party, under the apprehension of its weakness, and sought protection or indemnity beneath the standard of rebellion. But the number of these is trifling indeed, compared with those who acted upon different principles, and under different circumstances. Among the higher ranks of insurgents, we find the preponderating inducements to have been, political disappointment, and distressed circumstances; among the lower orders, religious animosity and the hope of plunder. With respect to property therefore, though some opulent persons appear among the conspirators, we may safely affirm the advantage to have been, beyond all degree of competition, on the side of Government.

IN point of numbers, rebellion could certainly boast its standing upon more equal ground. Per-

haps we may even allow that at one time, the rebels and their adherents were more numerous than the loyal party. The friends of revolution, however, have little cause to pride themselves on a circumstance which any other kind of general tumult or disturbance would as effectually have occasioned. They are much mistaken, indeed, if they attribute the number of their popular followers, to an enlarged knowledge of constitutional rights, or a deliberate preference of republican government. It is ignorance, not information that urges our half-barbarous peasantry to riot and insurrection ; it is not civilization, but the want of it, that renders them the easy dupes of every seditious incendiary. Great, however, as their numbers may be, their real strength under a government of vigour and decision, must be always trifling. Want of discipline, want of co-operation, and the difficulty of subsistence in large bodies, will always render them an easy conquest. Mobs are also proverbially versatile. The object of their veneration, easily becomes that of their hate, and the cause they espouse to-day may be reprobated and abandoned to-morrow. Under these circumstances, I confess, that I felt less apprehension for the event of the contest, than the alarming circumstances of our apparent situation seemed frequently to warrant. I knew that the popular ferment, which artifice might rise, could not, without such a degree of foreign aid as seemed very unlikely to arrive, long be kept afloat, and that temporary evil, and private calamity, would be the worst consequences of the insurrection.

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I have bestowed upon our common people an epithet which I could wish that subsequent reflection would allow me to retract. You, and I, can certainly bear witness to a very considerable improvement in their appearance, their manners, and their industry. We can remember when among the lower orders, shoes and stockings were no common luxury, when their understandings were clouded by excesses of ignorance and superstition, and when idleness and riot were the most prominent marks of their character.— The late improvement in agriculture, (still very defective) the increase of trade, the commencement of manufactures, and the natural advancement of social comfort under a regular and enlightened government, have considerably meliorated their condition, and humanized their manners. For whatever the arrogant speculator may pretend, the reformation of a people cannot be the work of a day. It requires the long and patient exertions of wisdom, to alter a national character, to inform ignorance, to eradicate prejudices, and to overcome habits. Though within the last thirty years, it must be acknowledged, that much has been done, it is equally certain that much remains to do. To those, who like us are acquainted with the dispositions, the customs, and the modes of life, of a people, among whom we have for so many years almost continually resided, it is unnecessary to enter into a minute delineation of character. The records of the passing day will amply suffice to convince the stranger that their propensity to idleness and riot is not yet subdued, and that, of the barbarity which has so long been lamented, too many traces

unfortunately still remain. Of such a people it is idle to say that they are to be reclaimed by indulgence, or won by concession. Injudicious indulgence is the nurse of mischief in old as well as young: truants and unseasonable concession, is considered as arising not from ~~love~~ but from fear. Let good conduct be treated with all the kindness it deserves, but viciousness and intemperance must be punished and restrained by necessary severity and salutary rigor.

I remain, &c.

LETTER VIII.

WITH all just abhorrence of cruelty and outrage, I can make great allowance for the excesses of our misguided peasantry. The seductive artifices by which they were instigated, might have deluded a people of greater steadiness, and higher information.— Justice too requires me to acknowledge, that several of those who engaged in the conspiracy, entered into the service, less moved by the hope of gain, than the fear of punishment, for it was assiduously inculcated, that every man who refused to participate would be treated as an enemy. In every country revolution will have some friends, because in every country, poverty will more or less be found, and the wretched naturally welcomes any change which promises to better his condition. In this kingdom, indigence alone

alone might have procured among the peasantry many profelytes to rebellion. The general causes of that indigence deserve to be noticed. They are in a great measure owing to a wrong system of Tenantship, which certainly may, and I trust gradually will be removed, but which certainly is by no means imputable to the incompetency or imperfections of Government. The main office of Government is to take care that Justice be impartially administered. To administration belongs the *protection* of Industry, but the free *exercise* of it must be left to individuals. The authority which forbids me to injure another man's property, allows me to make what use I please of my own. It will oblige a man to be just, but cannot compel him to be generous. The posseffor of an estate, might and ought to consult the comforts of his tenantry by directing and encouraging their industry, but if unfortunately he should chuse to take a contrary part, it is not in Government to remedy the evil. It is very clear that £20000 would be infinitely more valuable laid out in busines than locked up in a chest, yet it would be wrong in Government to compel the owner to make even a good use of it, not only because such a power would be frequently abused, but because no man will labour to obtain wealth which he is not permitted to enjoy according to his own fancy. The system of which I complain, and which appears to me the material grievance of our Peasantry, arises, from the short, uncertain, and insecure tenure under which their little farms are commonly held. The rents too for

for the most part are, considering the imperfect state of husbandry, too high, not allowing the occupyer means of comfortable subsistance. What warmth of attachment can the Peasant feel for that Country, in which the most unremitting labour will scarce suffice to procure him sustenance, and where, should extraordinary exertions be crowned with success, the fruits of his toil serve only to enrich his task-masters. Many of our occupyers are mere tenants at will, subject to the avarice or caparice of a Landlord, who seldom scruples to turn him adrift, in order to make room for a person more solvent or more submissive. Many of our Landed Proprietors, however benevolent, live at too great a distance, to know or relieve the situation of their Tenantry. Too many of those that live among them are addicted to pleasures, and in the distress occasioned by their own extravagance, lose sight of their suffering dependants. Hence has arisen the system of *middle* Landlordship, the pernicious consequences of which, though long felt, are not yet entirely removed. To take a coarse and uncultivated tract for the purpose of improvement, and afterwards to let it at an advanced rent, I consider to be fair profit and useful exertion, but it is not uncommon to see persons pay thousands per annum in rent, who never tilled a field, raised a hedge, or built a house, who unindustrious themselves, derive, like Negro-drivers an income from the sweat of the Poor, by whose labour they are enriched, but in whose happiness they feel no interest. This state of degredation, if it did not generate, at least

least encouraged that propensity to theft which has so long been the reproach of our common people. A Peasant, whose uncertainty of possession permits not the planting of a Tree on his own ground, if he wants a handle for his spade or a twig for his basket, watches an opportunity of stealing from his more fortunate neighbour, that necessary implement which perhaps he is unable to purchase. A vice once established becomes difficult to remove, and he frequently carries with him, to an improved situation, the evil habit which originated in necessity. While I lament the existence of a system so pregnant with mischief, I must acknowledge with pleasure that of late, it has been rapidly declining. Landed Proprietors began to see, that it was not only disgraceful and calamitous to the country, but materially injurious to themselves, who became in fact only rent chargers on their own estates. A more liberal plan in consequence was adopted, and several of the great Proprietors, rejecting the interference of *middle men*, stimulated at once and rewarded the industry of the farmer, by making him a lease of his holding, at even lower rents than the farmer would have given. A flourishing and industrious Yeomanry constitute the true strength of a Country, and though in this kingdom they are the class of inhabitants most to be wished for, they have been the class most wanted. Among them will always be found the firmest friends of establishment, because order and tranquillity are essentially necessary to their welfare. Ambition disturbs not the happy mediocrity of their situation, and

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forms of Government, or squabbles for power, excite no emotion in those, who only look for security and protection. I will not say that this observation has been strictly exemplified in this Rebellion, because when religion mixes in the dispute, the ordinary motives of action cease to operate. But it is certain that they were the last to engage in it, and the most difficult to be influenced. They also have been the greatest sufferers. The rich could spare from his superfluity, and the poor, in saving his life, has saved his all. But where rebellion raged, the farmer has to lament the loss of his comforts and the fruits of his industry. I trust that all such as listened too fondly to the voice of the betrayer, have seen their error and become sensible of their folly, and I trust also that the gentry of this country, will hereafter turn a more assiduous attention to the encouragement of the peasant, and the improvement of agriculture. How much is it to be lamented that the wanton speculations of ambitious vanity should engross the general attention, while so many useful as well as pleasant objects of pursuit, remain neglected and forgotten! To country-gentlemen a farm will never fail to afford most healthful exercise; and most rational employment, accompanied by the delightful consciousness, that while amusing himself, he is a material benefactor to his country. In town, a variety of laudable studies and profitable occupations solicit the exertion of curiosity and abilities. Chymistry and natural philosophy offer their inexhaustible fund of recreation and knowledge. Architecture invites the accommodation

modation of the opulent and the taste of the artist.—Commerce and Manufacture afford to the enterprizing the means of enriching themselves, and giving subsistence and happiness to thousands. Of all human aims the pursuit of power is perhaps the most barren of remuneration. Few, very few ever completely attain their object, and those that do, experience I believe very frequently the fate of Ixion. They embrace a cloud instead of a goddess, and find their enjoyment to be far more visionary than substantial. But politics are the rage of the day, and untill the fervor subsides, the calm voice of reason will plead unnoticed.

In pursuing this subject I have far exceeded the limits I proposed to myself, yet still find that much remains to be said. Among other matters the relative situation of this Country with England suggests a fertile topic of discussion. I have long been of opinion that the connection of two empires, by a Crown alone, with distinct independent houses of parliament, had something in it awkward and preposterous, and which could not fail to be a fruitful source of jealousy and discord. *Imperium in Imperio* is allowed to be a sophism in politics. Scotland and Ireland, for in this case, a river or a channel makes no difference, should be independent kingdoms or integral parts of one empire. Nominal independence may be more flattering to national pride, but true glory, as well as strength will be found in union. We have the

sanction of example to direct us. Scotland has tried the experiment and succeeded, Difficulties no doubt occur, but I should hope not insurmountable. You have already so encouraged me by your approbation, that I may, perhaps, send you my thoughts on this as well as other subjects of national concern. It is no small presumption, I confess, to treat of matters so much beyond my depth, but I am comforted by this reflection, that though I contribute little to the general stock of useful information, I shall at least add nothing to that of turbulence and discontent, and that if I do no good, I shall at least escape the imputation of doing harm.

I remain, &c.



F I N I S.